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SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST TURKEY PRESS SUMMARY FOR MARCH 23, 2005

This is the Southeastern Turkey press summary for March 23, 2005. Please note that Turkish press reports often contain errors or exaggerations; AmConsulate Adana does not vouch for the accuracy of the reports summarized here.

POLITICAL, SECURITY, HUMAN RIGHTS

BOLGE / CUMHURIYET / EKSPRES: Adana MPs from AKP (Justice and Development Party) who held different opinions regarding the current economic status of Turkey during their visit to Adana Chambers yesterday, were not pleased to hear Abdullah Caliskan, one of the MPs, claiming, "The (Turkish) economy can be compared to a puffed-up balloon: a touch of a needle can collapse it at any time, the current economic picture in Turkey forebodes a crisis that may be more severe than the one in 2001." Abdullah Dogru, Adana Provincial Chairperson, criticized Caliskan for being a doomsayer and added that Turkish economy is stable and credible.

ZAMAN / SABAH (GUNEY) / EKSPRES / BOLGE / MILLIYET: Cukurova Journalists' Association and Adana Branch of the Turkish Union of Journalists began their march to Ankara to demand changes in the penal code, which is to take effect on April 1. The journalists, blaming the penal code for restricting freedom, stated that the new code not only punishes journalists, but also local media owners.

MILLIYET / RADIKAL / HURRIYET / YENI SAFAK / SABAH CUMHURIYET / ZAMAN / EKSPRES / SABAH (GUNEY): Tuncer Bakirhan, DEHAP (Democratic People's Party) leader condemned the attempt to burn the Turkish flag in Mersin as a provocation and stated that the Turkish flag is at the same time the flag of Kurds. The Mersin Journalists Association denounced the beating of journalists during Mersin's Newruz celebrations. A crowded group of people (reportedly 15,000 people) with nationalist tendencies marched in Mersin. A commotion started due to an unspecified reason and people began throwing stones at the students in a schoolyard, receiving (unspecified) retaliatory actions. A journalist was wounded and the agitated protestors tried to assault some people who were saved later by police. All the institutions and organizations covered their buildings with Turkish flags in Mersin. The police officer, who saved the flag from being trodden on and burned, was awarded with twenty-four salary installments. Mersin Security Director said that they have identified the provokers that attempted to burn the Turkish flag.

CUMHURIYET / OZGUR GUNDEM: Sinan Yerlikaya, Tunceli MP from CHP (Republican People's Party), brought to the agenda of the Turkish parliament the issue of whether the resources that were to be spent for facilitating the return of the people to their villages in southeastern Turkey were being spent properly or not. Abdulkadir Aksu, Minister of Interior, is to answer the question put forth by Yerlikaya.

RADIKAL / OZGUR GUNDEM: Norwegian Ambassador Hans Wilhem Longva denied CNN Turk channel's allegation that his wife chanted slogans at the Newruz celebrations. Ambassador (Longva) said that his wife was in Norway and no other delegation from Norway participated in the celebrations. Longva visited the Mayor of Diyarbakir and expressed that he felt honored to see people's enthusiasm during Newruz in Diyarbakir. Longva praised the professional treatment of Turkish police to people during Newruz in Diyarbakir as well.

OZGUR GUNDEM: A 41-year-old village guard was found dead in Dilektasi village of Yuksekova district in Hakkari. The district Jandarma Command initiated an investigation into case.

OZGUR GUNDEM: Tension persists in Hazro district of Diyarbakir, where a gun attack that (allegedly) was sparked by Dolan family, killed a person and wounded Mayor Hamit Ergin and his brother. Although people are not allowed to go outside in the district, it is reported that the female members of Dolan family allegedly burned down the eleven houses, which belong to the relatives of Mayor Hamit Ergin. The male members of the Dolan family reportedly have already been taken into custody.

CUMHURIYET: Cumhuriyet criticized Huseyin Celik's (Minister of Education) remarks during the opening ceremony of a private school construction in Adana, which emphasized that the government's policy backs three hundred percent private schools openings. According to Cumhuriyet, the government is trying to further the causes of the Fethullah Gulen school network.

CUMHURIYET: During an interview Die Welt conducted with Selim

Sadak, former DEP (Democracy Party MP), Sadak said that the reforms in Turkey remained paper reforms and were not seriously implemented. When asked whether the "Democratic People's Movement" had originally emanated from the ideas of the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, Sadak said that the origins of the idea did not matter. According to Sadak, "The important thing is that a mass party should be established to answer the broader needs of the people. The people that the PKK addresses are the same people we address."

HURRIYET (CUKUROVA): Jvrg Metger, German Federal Republic's FRG Deputy Chief of Mission, paid a visit to the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce and he obtained information about the economic development of the city. Metger praised the industrial and economic development of Gaziantep and said that the FRG is supporting the full EU membership of Turkey.

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